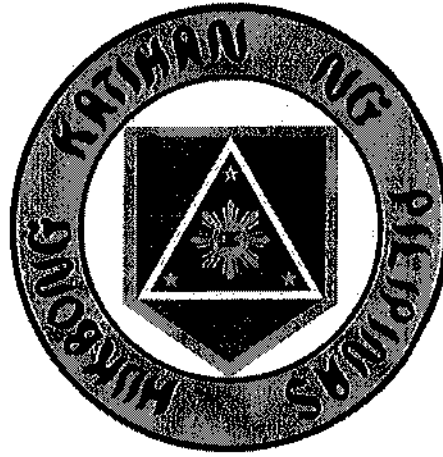


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NEWS CLIPPINGS

14 January 2019

Monday

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RIGHT OF WAY WOES HOUND ROAD PROJECTS

SPECIAL REPORT BY MARICAR CINCO AND DJ YAP

Infrastructure projects worth P74.6 billion are stalled because of unresolved access problems, according to Senator Lacson. It's not just a waste of taxpayer money, he says, it's illegal.

AB

FROM A1

By Maricar Cinco
@maricarcincoINQ

(First of three parts)

SAN PASCUAL, BATANGAS— A single-story house stands in the middle of a newly built concrete road at Barangay Bayanan in this town, an oddity that speaks volumes about planning for an infrastructure project funded by the national government.

Construction workers over the last two years had to literally skip the Brucals' residence in the middle of the highway, leaving the house to stand on a mound about 3 meters above the paved road.

"We just had the house built last year," Victoria Brucal said as she and her young daughter hurried out of their home, its walls still unpainted, for another meeting with the government on a Thursday afternoon.

She said her family was having problems selling the house to the government as they had only tax declarations to prove ownership of the property.

The government had offered them P710,393.34, but this was only for the house. They were not offered anything for the land, which is about 100 square meters.

Compensation

Under Republic Act No. 10752, or the Right-of-Way Act, the government may take private real property for national government infrastructure projects after paying the owners the appraised value.

Section 2 of the law states that the government must ensure owners "are promptly paid just compensation for the expeditious acquisition of the required right of way for the projects."

But requirements to claim compensation include land titles or, in the case of imperfect titles

such as the Brucals', at least 30 years of "continuous, peaceful possession" of the property.

Several other residents also only have tax declarations to present, said a 65-year-old landowner, who asked not to be named.

Luckily, the landowner only had a couple of banana trees to lose when the road ate up 2,000 sq m of her property, but she had not been paid yet even for those trees.

"We gave them the permit to enter but told them not to touch any of the structures until we get paid," said another property owner, Juling Espiritu, 69.

Three of her relatives' houses would have to be torn down, eventually.

Two roads

In 2017, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) started the construction of at least two major roads in Batangas—the 9.69-kilometer Bauan-San Pascual-Batangas City bypass and diversion road and the 11-km Lipa City-Padre Garcia Diversion Road.

The projects were proposed


by Deputy Speaker Raneo Abu and Sen. Ralph Recto, respectively. Abu represents the second district of Batangas, while Recto, a former Batangas representative, is the husband of Lipa City Rep. Vilma Santos-Recto.

The DPWH said over 50 percent of the projects had been completed and some portions

were already passable to pickup trucks or sport utility vehicles.

To this day, however, not a single landowner had received compensation.

At Lipa's Barangay Talisay, the DPWH had completed the first 1-km segment of the concrete road but stopped construction right before the approach to



**We gave them
the permit to enter
but told them not
to touch any of the
structures until
we get paid**

Juling Espiritu
Property owner

Jubilant Homes, a 10-year-old low-cost private subdivision, leaving a long stretch of dirt road.

"We've already spent more than P300,000 [to have the land titles fixed and comply with DPWH requirements] but haven't received a single centavo [from the government]," said resident Marcelino Labo, 59, whose family owned two properties (covering a total of 4,000 sq m) in Talisay.

According to the DPWH, the Lipa-Padre Garcia road will follow an existing village road and steer clear of Jubilant Homes, a community with

more than a hundred houses.

Right of way problems

Despite being allocated P234 million in the 2018 budget, project implementation was stalled due to right of way problems.

Abu said the Bauan-San Pascual-Batangas City route design had been in the pipeline since 2014 but the DPWH opted to prioritize road widening at the time.

Marvey Gonzales, head of the DPWH Task Force on Right of Way Acquisition in Batangas and Cavite provinces, said 147 title holders were claiming compensation in the Bauan-San Pascual-Batangas City project and 112 in the Lipa-Padre Garcia project.

He said the DPWH had paid a few of the claimants, including paying about P5 million to one landowner, but only for the cleared out crops and trees.

Finding an appraiser seemed the primary cause of delay in both projects.

Under the law, only government financial institutions or central bank-accredited appraisers are allowed to assess property for right of way acquisition.

Review of the law

Gonzales said it was only in November 2018 that the DPWH found an independent appraiser—after efforts to contract Land Bank of the Philippines or Luzon Development Bank failed and three unsuccessful bids for a private appraiser—for the Bauan-San Pascual-Batangas City project.

The DPWH is still looking for an appraiser for the Lipa City-Padre Garcia project, he said.

"Ours is only an oversight function. And we see that what really hampered [the project] were the strict provisions [in the Right-of-Way Act]," Abu said.

He said he would initiate a review of the law, particularly the appraisal policies and how to compensate owners, including those without property titles. **INQ**

US Navy exec axed for paid sex in Phi

The commander of a United States Navy submarine was relieved from his post in August following his admission of hiring female prostitutes while the vessel was docked in the Philippines early last year, according to a report published in a Washington state newspaper on Friday.

Capt. Travis Zettel, commander of the USS Bremerton, was fired in August "following a loss of confidence in his ability to command the Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine, which is now tied up in Bremerton for decommissioning," the *Kitsap Sun* reported.

The Bremerton, Washington-based daily said it based its report on documents received through a Freedom of Information Act request.

The report said the incident occurred during the submarine's port call in Subic Bay on March 1. Zettel was reportedly seen with 10 "provocatively dressed females outside the front door of (his) hotel" at dinnertime of that day, according to a tipster interviewed by the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS)

agents over the Department of Defense Inspector General's hotline.

The report added that Zettel told the tipster and another sailor that he had "requested/ordered 10 girls to arrive at the hotel." Another sailor, according to the newspaper, told investigators he saw "Zettel walking around and talking to other sailors in his command with three local females holding onto his arm."

In May, almost a month after the vessel arrived in Bremerton for decommissioning, the NCIS launched a criminal probe and confronted Zettel with the allegations, the *Kitsap Sun* report said.

Zettel, a Puyallup, Washington native commissioned in 1998 and first served on board the USS Salt Lake City

Turn to Page 8

US Navy From Page 1

before carrying out various assignments aboard other subs, "admitted culpability in the payment of female accompani-

ment," it added.

After he was reprimanded and relieved of his command, Zettel was administratively

reassigned to the staff of Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor-based Submarine Squadron 19, the report said, quoting Navy officials then.

The other sailor, who was

also interviewed by authorities but said he "did not participate in prostitution," was not "pursued for disciplinary action," the report said.

The STAR tried to reach

the US embassy but it was unavailable for comment.

Meanwhile, Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. called the United States a "responsible state" for the

decision to relieve Zettel.

"He was fired by the US government. Now that's a responsible state," Locsin said in a post on Twitter.

- With Pia Lee-Bravo

EX-PH NAVY CHIEF'S WARNING

CHINA'S SHIPYARD TAKEOVER OPPOSED

A former Philippine Navy chief has sounded the alarm over security and strategic implications of a Chinese company taking over a local unit of Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction Corp., which operates a commercial shipyard on Subic Bay in Zambales province.

"Let's be aware that this Hanjin shipyard issue is not just about business, financial and other economic issues. This is a very significant national security issue!" Vice Adm. Alexander Pama said in a Facebook post on Saturday.

Two Chinese companies were reported to be interested in taking over Hanjin Philippines, which declared bankruptcy last week after it defaulted on \$412 million in loans to Philippine banks. The amount is on top of its \$900-million debt to South Korean creditors.

"The ... Hanjin shipyard in Subic Bay will give the owners unlimited access to one of our most strategic geographic naval and maritime assets," Pama said.

Pama served as Navy chief from 2011 to 2012, at a time when the Philippines was strongly critical of China's massive claims in the South China Sea.

China access

Subic Bay, where there was a US naval base until 1992, lies about 260 kilometers from the Chinese-occupied Panatag (Scarborough) Shoal in the West Philippine Sea, waters within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea. It is also the safest and nearest port



Alexander Pama

facing the disputed waterway.

When the Americans left, the naval base was transformed into an industrial hub. Naval ships of foreign countries, including the United States, make port calls there from time to time.

The biggest Philippine Navy ships also take shelter at Subic.

Pama expressed concern that if China would gain access to the shipyard, it could later serve different purposes.

"Chinese Coast Guard boats patrolling [Panatag] may rest, do repairs and get provisions at Subic," he told Inquirer.net.

"We're scrambling to take control of [islets], but we are giving [away] the shipyard at Subic," he added.

One of the two Chinese companies interested in taking over the shipyard is state-owned. Any of them can pay off the debts of Hanjin Philippines.

The shipyard's declaration of bankruptcy is the biggest corporate default in the Philippines.

Hanjin Philippines, which employs 23,000 workers, has

sought rehabilitation and protection from creditors.

Its five biggest creditors—Rizal Commercial Banking Corp., Land Bank of the Philippines, Metropolitan Bank and Trust Co., Bank of the Philippine Islands and Banco de Oro Universal Bank—have agreed to temporarily take control of the company.

They are not seizing collateral ahead of other creditors so as not to jeopardize efforts to rehabilitate it.

Patriots needed

Pama urged the government and the business sector to look into the possibility of acquiring the shipyard.

"Let us all be aware and wary of the serious security and other strategic implications of this issue. I urge our patriotic business community and the government not to allow Hanjin Shipyard to fall into the wrong hands," he said.

The threat to national security was also raised by those against Chinese investments in the national power grid and in the telecommunication company that would compete against Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. and Globe. **AI**

A member of the consortium that owns National Grid Corp. of the Philippines is State Grid Corp. of China.

State-owned China Telecom is a partner of Mislattel, the Filipino company the government chose recently to help break the telecom duopoly in the country.

—FRANCES MANGOSING INQ

J

Thousands join interfaith rally for clean elections

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

An estimated 6,000 people yesterday joined an interfaith rally and covenant signing in Quezon City for clean, peaceful, orderly and credible midterm elections in May.

Administration and opposition candidates attended the event together with officials from the Commission on Elections (Comelec), Department of the Interior and Local Government, Philippine National Police (PNP), Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and other government agencies.

The activity started as early as 5 a.m. and ended at around 9 a.m., according to the Quezon City Police District (QCPD).

The event was preceded by a unity walk from various parts of the city and ended at the Quezon Memorial Circle.

Five of the senatorial

Turn to Page 14

Thousands From Page 13

candidates of the opposition were present. They were Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino IV, Magdalo party-list Rep. Gary Alejandro, lawyers Jose Manuel Diokno and Lorenzo Tanada III and civic leader Samira Gutoc.

Former presidential communications assistant secretary Mocha Uson, who is running for a seat in Congress as representative of AA-Kasosyo party-list, and former police senior superintendent Cesar Mancao, candidate of May Pag-asa party-list, were also in attendance.

The candidates joined other representatives from the government and private sectors in calling for peaceful and honest elections.

"Mahalaga at maganda na nagsamasama yung iba-ibang institution such as the PNP, AFP, Comelec and the candidates to push for peaceful elections," Aquino told reporters.

He admitted they are facing an uphill battle being part of the opposition. But he expressed confidence they could still catch up in the coming months.

"Before the start of the campaign, *mabibigyan ng oras at swing ang mga kasama sa Otso Diretso*," Aquino said, referring to the opposition slate.

The other members of the senatorial slate are former interior chief Manuel Roxas II, election lawyer Romulo Macalintal and former solicitor general Florin Hilbay.

The candidates recited and signed an Integrity Pledge, the highlight of the activity where they promised to abide by the country's laws, respect the sanctity of the electoral exercise and shun any form of violence.

PNP chief Director General Oscar Albayalde, in a speech read by Director Rolando Felix of the Directorate for Integrated

Police Operations for Visayas, called for the cooperation of all participants to ensure peaceful elections.

"I take this opportunity to enjoin everyone to help us sustain and strengthen our peace efforts during the entire election period. Everyone has a vital role in this effort," Albayalde said.

While there will always be evil elements out to sow fear and violence, the PNP chief said he is confident a united country will thwart any attempt to disrupt the polls.

"As long as we remain vigilant, these evil forces will not prosper in perpetrating their activities," he said.

National Capital Region Police Office chief Director Guillermo Eleazar said there were no untoward incidents in Metro Manila on the first day of the election period, except for a tricycle driver who was arrested at a checkpoint in Manila for alleged shabu possession.

PNP calls for peaceful, honest elections

By MARTIN A. SADONGDONG

The Philippine National Police (PNP) kicked off the 2019 election period Sunday with a nationwide unity walk for peaceful and honest polls.

In Metro Manila, around 6,000 individuals participated in the "Unity Walk, Interfaith Rally and Peace Covenant Signing for the 2019 Midterm Elections" from Quezon City Hall to the Quezon City Memorial Circle.

The unity walk was participated in by representatives from the PNP, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Commission on Elections (Comelec),

senatorial candidates Benigno "Bam" Aquino IV, Chel Diokno, and Rafael Alunan III; and Party-list representative candidates Mocha Uson for AAKasosyo, Arturo Lumibao for ONE Philippines and Cesar Mancao II for Kilusang May Pagasa among others.

Similar activities were held in different provinces across the country.

The PNP also started the strict implementation of Comelec-established checkpoints nationwide Sunday midnight.

PNP chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde said 18 election watchlist areas (EWAs) remain under strict monitoring.

The 18 EWAs are Sudipen and Bala-wan towns (La Union); Jones (Isabela); Lemery (Batangas); Roxas (Oriental Mindoro); Balud and Dimasalang (Masbate); Pagadian City (Zamboanga del Sur); Cagayan de Oro City (Misamis Oriental); Fajdi mohammad Ajul, Lantawan and Tipo-Tipo (Basilan); Marawi City and Sultan Dumalondong (Lanao del Sur); Mamasapano, Shariff Aguak, Shariff Saydona Mustapha and Datu Unsay (Maguindanao).

In past interviews, Albayalde said Daraga town in Albay is being considered to be placed under Comelec control after the killing of Ako Bicol Party-list Representative Rodel Bato-

cabe last December.

Meanwhile, National Capital Region Police Office Director Guillermo Eleazar said the teamwork of all stakeholders is needed for the success of the midterm elections on May 13.

"The coming elections symbolize the right of every Filipinos to choose the leaders and our united prayer is one way of informing the public that we are united in our endeavor to guard against individuals who plan to stain and defraud the polls," Eleazar said during the unity walk.

Eleazar also reminded the public that the Comelec gun ban has officially started Sunday along with the election period. It will end on June 12, he said.

Traffic at the Quezon Memorial Circle was almost at a standstill because of the unity walk.

Personnel from the Comelec, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), National Police Commission (Napolcom), Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Education (DepEd) were among the best represented government agencies in the event.

Officers from the Quezon City Police District (QCPD) were on hand as early as 2 a.m. to ensure the safety of the participants in the event.

The portion of Elliptical Road from East Ave. to Kalayaan Ave. was closed to traffic at 5 a.m. (With Chito A. Chavez)

COMELEC, POLICE, BETS SIGN PEACE COVENANT

OFFICIALS of the Commission on Elections (Comelec), the Philippine National Police (PNP), the military and candidates in this year's polls held unity walks and prayer rallies in various areas and signed a

covenant for peaceful elections. The unity walks and signing of peace covenants were held in Quezon City, Bulacan and Marawi City. Chief Supt. Joel Napoleon Coronel, Police Regional Office

►CovenantA2

COVENANT FROM A1

Comelec

3 acting director, said the events were organized by the Comelec, the PNP and Armed Forces of the Philippines. The event in Bulacan was joined by 500 police personnel. The unity walk started at 4:30 a.m. at the historic Barasoain Church and ended at the provincial capitol gym.

Coronel said delegates and other stakeholders from Region 3 came from various government agencies such as the Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Public Works and Highways, National Police Commission, National Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Fire Protection, Bureau of Jail and Management and Penology, and Commission on Higher Education.

Members of non-government organizations and *barangay* (village) officials also took part in the events.

Only a few aspirants in the May midterm polls, however, turned up for the signing of the peace covenant.

The prayer rally was led by Msgr. Pablo Legaspi, pastor John Pangilinan and Ustaz Gamor from the Muslim community.

Tenile Lambino, Comelec regional director, said the events symbolized democracy and a better community where they want to showcase honest, orderly and fair elections.

At least 6,000 people joined the events in Quezon City. Aside from Comelec, police and military officials, representatives of the Public Attorney's Office, the Department of



FOR PEACEFUL, HONEST POLLS

Participants from various sectors as well as national and local candidates join the Unity Walk, Inter-Faith Prayer Rally and Peace Covenant Signing for the 2019 Midterm Elections at the Quezon City Memorial Circle on Sunday. PHOTO BY RUY MARTINEZ

the Interior and Local Government, and the National Citizens' Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) were also present.

Among the politicians seen in the event were Sen. Paolo Benigno Aquino 4th, Rep. Gary Alejano of Magdalo party-list, former DILG secretary Rafael Alunan 3rd, women's rights advocate Samira Ali Gutoc-Tomawis, human rights lawyer Lorenzo Tañada 3rd and Jose Manuel Diokno, and former communications assistant secretary Margaux "Mocha" Uson, among others.

Chief Supt. Joselito Esquivel, director of the Quezon City Police District (QCPD), said the groups assembled in front of the Quezon City Hall at 4 a.m. and marched to the Quezon City circle.

In his speech, Metro Manila Police Director Guillermo Eleazar said the

unity walk should serve as a warning to threat groups attempting to disrupt the elections.

"We are united as one guarding the peacefulness and maintaining the cleanliness of this year's polls," Eleazar said.

In Marawi, candidates for elective positions in Lanao del Sur vowed to make the May 2019 elections peaceful and credible as they joined the unity walk and prayer rally.

Lanao del Sur Police Provincial Office Director Police Senior Supt. Madzgani Mukaram said 400 politicians and members of various groups participated in the event.

He said the candidates signed a peace covenant titled "Integrity Pledge," where they vowed to ensure free, orderly, honest, peaceful and

credible elections.

Col. Romeo Brawner Jr., Philippine Army 103rd Brigade commander based in Kampo Ranao, challenged candidates to keep the upcoming electoral exercise peaceful.

Preparations

Also on Sunday, Comelec spokesman James Jimenez said poll officials were scheduled to visit on Monday the facilities of the National Printing Office (NPO) to see its readiness for the printing of ballots.

Jimenez said the printing machines of the NPO can churn out 800,000 ballots a day.

"At this point, we see no problem meeting our timeline," he added.

The NPO will print more than 60 million ballots, including those for overseas voters.

During the 2016 elections, 85 embassies and consulates were designated as polling centers. Overseas voters are only allowed to vote for national candidates such as president, vice president and senators.

Jimenez also reminded police and military personnel manning Comelec checkpoints around the country that the "plain view doctrine" or visual inspection is in effect.

He said checkpoints must be located in well-lit areas and manned by uniformed personnel of the PNP or AFP.

Under Comelec Resolution 10468, police or military personnel should not compel motorists to step out of their vehicle, unless there is a reasonable ground.

**FREDERICK SILVERIO,
WILLIAM B. DEPASUPIL,
DEMPSEY REYES AND
MASIDING NOOR YAHYA**

Unity walk: Calls mount for peaceful polls

SOME 4,000 people on Sunday joined a unity walk and prayer rally to call for safe and peaceful elections this year as the election period officially opened.

Government workers, the religious, teachers and students, members of non-government organizations, soldiers and candidates joined the Inter-Faith Prayer Rally and Peace Covenant Signing for the 2019 Midterm Elections at the Quezon City Memorial Circle.

At 4 a.m. the attendees, together with electoral candidates, walked from the Quezon City Hall to the Quezon City Memorial Circle.

After the walk, the people gathered in front of the grandstand where different religious leaders interceded for unity and peace during the mid-term polls in May.

In his speech, National Capital Region Police Office chief, Director Guillermo Eleazar said the activity emphasizes the importance of teamwork of different commissions, groups, organizations and candidates nationwide to achieve fair and peaceful elections.

"Let us offer the peaceful signing of

Next page

Unity walk...

From A1

covenant to our God who is with us in our vision as we allow him to intervene in this quest," he said in a mix of English and Filipino.

"The upcoming elections symbolizes the right of every Filipino to choose leaders and our united prayer is a way to inform our fellowmen that we are one in the aim to guard against who plan to stain and defraud the elections", he added.

Armed Forces of the Philippines chief-of-staff, Gen. Benjamin Madrigal Jr. said the participation of their personnel shows the military's "unwavering commitment in keeping the integrity, sanctity and security of a fair and honest elections."

"At this moment, AFP is affirming its commitment in assuring that our fellowmen are able to exercise their right to vote. AFP is the protector of the Filipino people and the state, intensifying our efforts to keep all electoral threats at bay, coordinating with everyone who attended here to uphold successful elections and the AFP shall remain apolitical and non-partisan as the President continues to remind us to be neutral," he added.

Among the candidates who attended the event were reelectionist Senator Paolo Benigno Aquino IV, Chel Diokno and Rafael Alunan III.

Also on Sunday, Ilocos Norte Gov. Imee Marcos called for the creation and accreditation of a new independent poll watchdog to ensure clean and honest elections in May.

Marcos said the presence of technical experts in every polling precinct would help guarantee the integrity of the election and avoid a repeat of vote rigging and fraud that marred the 2016 automated polls.

"The new election watchdog should not only be keen on guarding forms of electoral fraud that we are all aware of even before we shifted to automated elections, but it must also have the technical expertise so we can be assured that the upcoming elections are free and fair," said Marcos, who is running for senator under the Nacionalista Party.

PNA

6,000 katao nakiusa sa unity walk sa halalan

Nina CHITO A. CHAVEZ at JUN FABON

Sandaling huminto ang daloy ng trapilko kahapon sa pagmartsa ng tinatayang 6,000 estudyante, mga indibidwal mula sa iba't ibang ahensiya ng pamahalaan at iba pang grupo para sa Unity Walk, Inter-Faith Prayer Rally sa Quezon City Memorial Circle para lpanawagan ang manyos, mapayapa, at tapat na halalan sa Mayo.

Kabilang ang mga tauhan mula sa Commission on Elections, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), National Police Commission (Napolcom), Department of Justice (DoJ) at Department of Education (DepEd) sa mga ahensiya ng pamahalaan na may pinakamaraming kinatawan sa

okasyon.

Dakong 2:00 pa lamang ng madaling araw ay nakabantay na ang mga operatiba ng Quezon City Police District (QCPD) upang ityakin ang kaligtasan ng mga kalahok.

Nauna rito ay pinayuhan ni QCPD director, Chief Supt. Joselito T. Esquivel Jr., ang mga motorista sa bahagi ng Quezon Memorial Circle kaugnay sa okasyon sa umaga.

Dakong 4:00 ng umaga nang magsidatingan ang mga kalahok.

Isinara ang isang bahagi ng Elliptical Road, mula East Ave. hanggang Kalayaan Ave., dakong 5:00 ng umaga.

Naglipun-tipun ang mga kalahok sa

unity walk sa harapan ng Quezon City Hall, partikular sa Sunken Garden sa open roads patungo sa Gate 8.

Mula sa Sunken Garden, dumiretso sila sa QCMC para sa inter-faith prayer rally at paglalagda ng peace covenant sa Liwasang Aurora, kung saan nagtatalumpati ang mga panauhing padangat kabilang sina Philippine National Police Chief, Director General Oscar Albayalde; Armed Forces of the Philippines Chief-of-Staff, Gen. Benjamin R. Madrigal Jr.; at Commission on Elections Chairman, Sheriff Abas.

Nagtapos ang aktibidad sa pagpapalipad ng mga puting kalapati bilang simbolo ng kapayapaan at pagkakaisa.

PNP begins setting up checkpoints all over PH

By AARON B. REQUENCO

With thousands of police checkpoints expected to be set up across the country for the May mid-term elections,

the Philippine National Police (PNP) assured yesterday that they would just go with the "plain view doctrine" in checking private vehicles.

At the same time, Chief Supt. **►4**

PNP begins setting...

Benigno Durana said that motorists should also take note of the courtesy and proper attire of the policemen while conducting checkpoints.

Durana explained that the plain view doctrine simply means that policemen should not go beyond what they see outside and inside the vehicle while checking the cars and the motorists.

"If you are on board a vehicle, you are not required to get off your car and open your trunk," said Durana.

"Our personnel will observe the plain view doctrine, meaning, just a visual search," he added.

The conduct of checkpoint recently became controversial following social media posts that showed policemen allegedly planting illegal drugs at the trunk of private cars.

The vehicle where the illegal drugs were planted would then be allegedly stopped at another checkpoint based on the tip-off by the policemen who first stopped the car.

It turned out that the posts were fake news and did not happen in the Philippines. The PNP condemned the fake news as a desperate attempt to malign the police force amid the drug war.

But are motorists required to roll down their window when stopped at the checkpoint?

Durana said that motorists should roll down their car windows since policemen are expected to talk to the motorists to inform them about the conduct of the checkpoints.

"Maybe just a little (roll down of windows) so that the motorist and the policeman could hear each other," said Durana.

But Durana said that the plain view doctrine also has exceptions.

"If our policemen see contraband through the plain view doctrine, that's the time they can conduct physical

search. They can even effect arrest," said Durana.

Courteous cops

Durana also advised motorists to take note of the attitude of the policemen conducting the checkpoints, noting that the strict instruction given to the policemen is to be courteous at all times.

The official said that motorists could report the rude behavior of policemen manning the checkpoints to the PNP for investigation and eventual disciplinary measures.

"Motorists should also take note of the proper conduct of checkpoint. First, it should be conducted in a well-lighted place; and second, it should be manned by policemen in proper uniform with nameplates," said Durana.

"The checkpoint should also be led by an officer and that there should be proper signage about the checkpoint," he added.

In order to ensure transparency, Durana said that policemen would not mind if motorists would take videos of the entire checkpoint procedures.

"It is the right of the motorists and that will allow us also to make our operations transparent," said Durana.

But in doing so, Durana also reminded motorists to be courteous to the policemen whom he said are just doing their job.

"The best way to pass through checkpoints seamlessly and peacefully is just to cooperate but at the same time be aware of your rights under the law," said Durana.

The setting up of checkpoints started yesterday — the start of the 150-day election period.

Based on the memorandum issued by the PNP leadership, police commanders are mandated to establish at least one checkpoint in each of the country's 1600 cities and municipalities in coordi-

nation with the local elections officer and military unit in the area.

As part of the security measures, the PNP will also be implementing a nationwide gun ban to deny criminal elements, particularly partisan armed groups, to roam around freely.

The gun ban implementation includes suspension of the privilege to carry the licensed firearms outside residences. Only uniformed personnel, in uniform and on duty, are allowed to carry guns.

Security guards, on the other hand, are governed by some rules and restriction when it comes to their service firearms.

Hope for the best

ROSARIO, Cavite — The opposition party is hoping for the best in the 2019 mid-term elections in terms of peace and order and results.

Senator Bam Aquino and Magdalo Party-list Representative Gary Alejano of Otso Diretso, formerly Oposisyon Koalisyon or Opposition Coalition, both shared the view that everyone should shun violence and work for an honest, orderly and peaceful election (HOPE) come May 13, 2019 and let the best candidates be voted and placed in positions.

Aquino and Alejano are senatorial bets of Vice President Leni Robredo-backed Otso Diretso, the opposition group, along with former Senator Mar Roxas, De La Salle University Law Dean Chel Diokno, Former Bangsamoro Transition Commission Member Samira Gutoc, Former Solicitor General Pilo Hilbay, election officer Romulo Macalintal, and Former House Deputy Speaker Erin Tanada.

The opposition senatorial group interacted with local officials of Rosario, Cavite, including barangay officers, on Saturday, January 12, at La Isla Bonita, a sprawling resort in Barangay Marisvilla and various sector members at the nearby Rosario Elementary School compound. (With a report from Anthony Giron)

Senators seek probe into passport data breach

BY BERNADETTE E. TAMAYO

FOUR senators have joined a call for an investigation into the reported breach of passport data at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA).

Opposition Sen. Risa Hontiveros on Saturday called for an inquiry, after Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. admitted on his Twitter account that a privately contracted firm took the entire physical database of all the country's passport holders, after its contract was not renewed.

Senate Minority Leader Franklin Drilon and Senators Paolo Benigno "Bam" Aquino 4th, Aquilino Pimentel 3rd and Panfilo Lacson on Sunday cited the national security implications of the reported breach.

Locsin's admission was prompted by a complaint from another Twitter user over DFA's requirement for applicants to submit anew birth or marriage certificates to renew their passports.

The National Privacy Commission has announced that it would conduct its own investigation and summon DFA officials, other concerned agencies, as well as the passport contractor.

APO subcontracted?

Drilon said the Department of Justice, Commission on Audit, and the National Privacy Commission must conduct the investigation.

"Dapat imbestigahan. May basehan para imbestigahan (It should be investigated. There is a basis for investigation)," said Drilon in a radio interview.

Drilon noted that state-owned APO Production Unit Inc. held the contract, but supposedly decided to tap another firm to print the passports.

"Why was it that APO was able to subcontract? It was reported that there is a prohibition in the MoA (memorandum of agreement) to subcontract," Drilon said.

Aquino, in a chance interview at the Quezon City Circle, said: *"I hope the DFA can take the lead in cleaning their ranks. The Senate can also investigate that."*

"Marami po talagang masamang posibleng mangyari dahil d'yan (It might lead to a lot of bad

things," he said.

Pimentel said in a text message: *"The DFA must explain. Why did it happen? I am filing a resolution to find out more."*

"We need to know what other data-gathering government agencies have entered into such a contract which is disadvantageous to the government and the people," he added.

Pimentel added, *"Why is it that the DFA does not have a copy of the data [of the passport holders]? What are the terms of the contract with the passport provider?"*

Lacson said it was difficult to understand why government agencies like the Land Transportation Office and the DFA would enter into contracts with private entities *"without making sure that the terms and conditions will protect the national security interest of our country and its people."*

"An in-depth investigation should immediately be conducted and those responsible must be made to face and suffer the consequences," Lacson said.

"Those databases in the hands of private contractors will definitely compromise vital information of individuals who have dealt with those agencies, and the number runs into millions of people," added Lacson, chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Order.

Hontiveros on Saturday said the data breach *"indicates a serious*

national security risk, and is evidence of the Duterte government's gross incompetence in protecting the people's private data."

"Exactly what data were lost? When, how and under whose watch did this happen? Who exactly is the responsible firm? And why aren't they being sued for running away with such vital information?" she asked.

"The public needs to be reassured that the data will be retrieved completely and with the highest sense of urgency and priority," Hontiveros said.

Sen. Gregorio Honasan, 2nd, an administration ally, said: "Everything from hereon is a function of proactive internal administration control and security measures, legal action."

"I agree with the SFA (Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin Jr.) that the immediate objective is to prevent it from happening again," said Honasan, chairman of the Senate Committee on Defense and National Security.

Robredo also wants probe

Vice President Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo on Sunday echoed the call of lawmakers to file criminal charges against the foreign company that ran off with personal data of passport holders.

"This is horrible and frightening. This means that the contractor tasked to make the passport left with the whole data system and it has access to all of our information," she said in her weekly radio show.

"A case should be filed against the firm because they do not own that data," Robredo added.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Sunday said the passport data breach could be considered a "very grave security concern," while National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr. downplayed the issue.

"If true, then it is a very grave security concern and quite alarming," Lorenzana told reporters.

Lorenzana noted that the primary information of passport holders, including the full name, date and place of birth, and other information "could be used illegally."

"We will get in touch with the DFA to find out the details of this issue and how to mitigate its ill effect," the Defense chief noted.

Esperon said there had been no indications of Philippine passport data being disseminated on the internet.

"Don't speculate yet because there has been no known leak of data [yet]," he told reporters in a separate message.

'Yellow crowd' blamed

Some Twitter users hit Locsin for blaming "the yellow crowd" for the issues surrounding the loss of passport data.

In a tweet on Saturday morning, Locsin said that the passport mess started during the term of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (GMA), now speaker of the House, and worsened during the Aquino 3rd (PNoy) Administration.

"The problem started under GMA's DFA and got worse under PNoy's DFA," he tweeted. "IT WILL BE SOLVED BY PRRD's (President Rodrigo Roa Duterte) DFA under Locsin. The yellow crowd who perpetrated the passport fraud are in a panic because we are gonna autopsy their crooked deal. Period."

His tweet did not sit well with some netizens.

"There you go again blaming others except the current administration," tweeted @BebieShan. "You've been in for almost 3 years. You had all the chances to improve it."

Locsin served as the Philippines' permanent representative to the United Nations before being named as secretary of foreign affairs, replacing Alan Peter Cayetano.

"I have my passport since time immemorial...under PNoy term I had renewed twice (2010 and 2015) less than an hour *tapos ako* (I was finished) then I had them delivered to my office 3 days after with NO Hassle," tweeted Alecks Puerta on Sunday. "*Wag manisi ayusin mo ang problema at hindi yung #Idontknow lang* (Don't keep accusing and just solve the issue, don't just say #Idontknow)."

"Last time I checked, it's 2019. This admin has been in ace for almost 3 years now, tweeted @allanray. "If this admin haven't fixed what crookedness existed in the first 2 years when they arrived, you really expect us to play the blame game by this point?"

WITH GLEE JALEA,
DEMPSEY REYES AND
ARIC JOHN SY CUA

DILG to local execs: Don't pay campaign fees to rebels

By EMMANUEL TUPAS

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) yesterday warned local officials against paying "permit to campaign fees" to communist rebels.

Interior Secretary Eduardo Año has issued a memorandum circular reminding all governors, mayors and electoral candidates that they could be held liable under Republic Act 10168 or the Terrorist Prevention and Suppression Act.

"Many reelectionists are in the heat of campaign mood,

whether discreetly or openly, as the May 2019 midterm elections near. *Paalala lang po na huwag magpaloko at magbayad ng 'permit to campaign' or 'permit to win' sa mga komunistang grupo na itinuturing ng gobyerno na mga terorista* (Just a reminder not to be duped and pay 'permit to campaign' or 'permit to win' to communist groups the government considers terrorists)," DILG spokesman Assistant Secretary Eduardo Malaya said in a statement.

The DILG directed all regional, provincial, city and municipal peace and order coun-

cils to recommend sanctions against local chief executives who are known to have supported the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed component, the New People's Army, through the payment of permit to campaign fees.

"Under this scheme, they demand money from candidates in exchange for allowing them to enter and campaign freely in the hinterlands that are within their area of operations," Malaya said.

He described the act as a form of extortion of the rebel to raise funds to fuel their

campaign to overthrow the government.

"The DILG is calling all (local government units) and law enforcement agencies to ensure that all candidates and political parties are allowed unhampered entrance in every LGU and to ensure the peace and order in all areas, including those considered as hotbeds of insurgency, so that all candidates and political parties are given access to the electorate during the campaign period without intimidation or manipulation by any group," he said. 12

DILG: LGU execs who pay NPA rebels face sanctions

By Jeannette I. Andrade
@jiandradeINQ

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) warned of sanctions against local government executives and other candidates for elective posts who paid "permit to campaign" fees or provide other forms of support to communist rebels.

In a statement on Sunday, DILG spokesperson Jonathan Malaya said a memorandum circular had been issued reminding all local officials to

avoid directly or indirectly giving financial, material and political support to the New People's Army (NPA), which the government had long considered a terrorist group.

Permit to campaign

According to Malaya, based on Interior Secretary Eduardo Año's issuance, the act of paying "permit to campaign" or even "permit to win" fees to the NPA was a violation of Republic Act No. 10168, or the "Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012."

Violation of the law is punishable by reclusion temporal to reclusion perpetua, and a fine of P500,000 to P1 million.

In his memorandum circular, Año directed all regional, provincial, city and municipal peace and order councils to "apply moral suasion or to recommend sanctions against local chief executives who are known to have supported communist rebels."

Malaya said that the NPA extortion scheme of demanding money from candidates in exchange for them to campaign

freely in certain areas was "repugnant to the right [to] suffrage, not only of candidates, but of the individual voters as well."

Disqualification

He added, "This practice becomes an opportunity [for] these nonstate actors (NPA) to raise funds to fuel their campaign against the government they wish to overthrow."

The DILG spokesperson warned that the DILG could also seek the disqualification of candidates based on the Omnibus Election Code. INQ *fy*

DILG exec warns election bets not to pay NPA campaign fees

By CHITO A. CHAVEZ

Paying "permit to campaign fees" to communist rebels is tantamount to supporting terrorism.

This was the stern warning of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to all governors, mayors and all political aspirants directly or indirectly giving financial, material, and political support to communist terrorist rebels as well as other non-state sectors.

DILG Assistant Secretary and spokesman Jonathan Malaya reminded all electoral candidates that such violations will be considered as terroristic acts that carry the stiffest sanctions as stated in the Constitution.

He said all political aspirants should not be made as tools for these unlawful acts asserting the "practice becomes an opportunity to these non-state actors to raise funds to fuel their campaign against the government they wish to overthrow."

"Secretary Eduardo Año has issued Memorandum Circular 2018-211 reminding all local chief executives and LGU officials that giving any form of support to communist rebels is a violation not only of Executive Order 733 but also of RA 10168," he said.

"Many re-electionists are in the heat of campaign mood, whether discreetly or openly, as the May 2019 midterm elections near. Paalala lang po na huwag magpaloko at magbayad ng 'permit to campaign' or 'permit to win' sa mga komunistang grupo na itinaturing ng gobyerno na mga terorista (I remind them not to accede and pay 'permit to campaign to win' to communist groups that the government considers as terrorists)," said Malaya.

In the said Memorandum Circular, Año directed all regional, provincial, city and municipal peace and order councils to apply moral suasion or to recommend sanctions against local chief executives who are known to have supported communist rebels.

Saying that this practice has long been in existence in Philippine politics, Malaya branded such acts as unpatriotic where rebels demand money from political candidates in exchange for trouble-free campaign sorties in the hinterlands

where the terrorist groups operate.

He emphasized the scheme is clearly a form of extortion and is repugnant to the right of suffrage not only of the candidates but of the individual voters as well.

"The DILG is calling all LGUs and law enforcement agencies to ensure that all candidates and political parties are allowed unhampered entrance in every LGU and to ensure the peace and order in all areas, including those considered as hotbeds of insurgency, so that all candidates and political parties are given access to the electorate during the campaign period without intimidation or manipulation by any group," he added.

Section 4 of the Republic Act (RA) No. 10168 otherwise known as "The Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012," states that: "Any person who, directly or indirectly, wilfully and without lawful excuse, possesses, provides, collects or uses property or funds or makes available property, funds or financial service or other related services, by any means, with the unlawful and wilful intention that they should be used or with the knowledge that they are to be used, in full or in part: (a) to carry out or facilitate the commission of any terrorist act; (b) by a terrorist organization, association or group; or (c) by an individual terrorist, shall be guilty of the crime of financing of terrorism."

Those found guilty of committing the said provision of RA 10168 shall suffer the penalty of reclusion temporal in its maximum period to reclusion perpetua and a fine of not less than P500,000 nor more than P1-million.

Malaya noted the DILG may also file other charges pursuant to the Revised Penal Code and other pertinent laws and seek the disqualification of all those candidates who shall be proven to have cooperated with said non-state actors in accordance with the provisions of the Omnibus Election Code.

"The same course of action shall be undertaken against those incumbent local government officials or employees who shall cooperate or give aid in any form or manner—material or otherwise, to non-state actors without prejudice to the administrative cases that shall be filed against them," added Malaya.

DILG to candidates: Don't give NPA campaign fees

BY VICTOR REYES

THE Department of Interior and Local Government yesterday warned local government officials and candidates in the May elections not to pay any "permit to campaign" and "permit to win" fees to the New People's Army.

Interior spokesman Jonathan Malaya said providing support, directly or indirectly, to the communist rebels is against laws like Republic Act 10168 or the Terrorism Financing, Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012.

The penalty for violation of RA 10168 is 10 to 17 years imprisonment to life imprisonment and a fine of P500,000 to P1 million, Malaya said.

President Duterte terminated peace talks between the govern-

ment and the communists last year. He has declared the Communist Party of the Philippines and the NPA as terrorist groups.

The "permit to campaign" and "permit to win" fees are called extortion by the defense and military establishments.

"Under this scheme, they demand money from candidates in exchange for allowing them to enter and campaign freely in the hinterland that are within their area of operations," Malaya also said.

The military recently asked candidates to refrain from paying such fees, and asked them to report any extortion attempt.

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana is not sold to President Duterte's idea of arming "everyone" if atrocities by communist rebels will worsen.

"I would suggest not arming everyone," Lorenzana said yesterday, adding that recruiting more militiamen might be the better way to address the threats posed by the communist rebels.

On Wednesday last week, Duterte said if there are widespread NPA atrocities and the people can no longer bear it he will be forced to order "arm everyone." He said he would allow the purchase of firearms to help local government officials in the fight against the insurgents in their areas.

Lorenzana said the President's idea of "arming everyone to fight the NPA" is "possible but with lots of challenges."

"Who are the people to be armed? Do we have enough firearms to arm everybody? We need to train these people in the op-

eration and care of the firearms before issuing them the firearms. How do we control the use of these firearms so that they are not used for other unauthorized activities?" Lorenzana said.

"Bottom line, it may not be advisable to arm everybody for all the problems that it may cause. We now have armed civilians, the Cafgu (Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units) and Cafgu II (also called special Cafgu)," said Lorenzana. / B3

There are about 50,000 Cafgus throughout the country, mostly utilized against the communists, according to the military.

"All we need is to increase their number. The beauty of the Cafgu program is that they are under the AFP and subject to military justice," said Lorenzana.

Poll bets warned vs paying 'campaign fees' to Reds

Paying "permit-to-campaign fees" to communist rebels is tantamount to supporting terrorism.

This was the stern warning of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) to all governors, mayors and all political aspirants directly or indirectly giving financial, material and political support to communist rebels.

DILG assistant secretary and spokesman Jonathan Malaya reminded all electoral candidates that such violations will be considered as terroristic acts that carry the stiffest sanctions as stated in the Constitution.

He said all political aspirants should not be made as tools for

these unlawful acts, asserting the "practice becomes an opportunity to these non-state actors to raise funds to fuel their campaign against the government they wish to overthrow".

"Secretary Eduardo Año has issued Memorandum Circular 2018-211 reminding all local chief executives and LGU officials that giving any form of support to communist rebels is a violation not only of Executive Order 733 but also of RA 10168," he said.

"Many re-electionists are in the heat of campaign mood, whether discreetly or openly, as the May 2019 midterm elections near. Paalala lang po na huwag mag-

paloko at magbayad ng 'permit to campaign' or 'permit to win' sa mga komunistang grupo na itinuturing ng gobyerno na mga terorista," said Malaya.

In his memorandum, Año directed all regional, provincial, city and municipal peace and order councils to apply moral suasion or to recommend sanctions against local chief executives who are known to have supported communist rebels.

Saying that this practice has long been in existence in Philippine politics, Malaya branded such acts as unpatriotic where rebels demand money from political candidates in exchange for trouble-free campaign sorties in the hinterlands where the

terrorist groups operate.

He emphasized the scheme is clearly a form of extortion and is repugnant to the right of suffrage not only of the candidates but of the voters as well.

"The DILG is calling all LGUs and law enforcement agencies to ensure that all candidates and political parties are allowed unhampered entrance in every LGU and to ensure the peace and order in all areas, including those considered as hotbeds of insurgency, so that all candidates and political parties are given access to the electorate during the campaign period without intimidation or manipulation by any group," he added. (Chito Chavez) 3

Lorenzana thumbs down arming Pinoys vs NPA

DEFENSE Secretary Delfin Lorenzana on Sunday rejected the idea of arming the public in a bid to end the communist insurgency in the country, saying it would pose "lots of challenges."

"I would suggest not arming everyone. Who are the people to be armed? Do we have enough firearms to arm everybody?" Lorenzana told reporters in a text message.

His statement came days after President Rodrigo Duterte said in his speech last week that he was keen on arming every civilian to eliminate the New People's Army (NPA) throughout the country.

But, Duterte's Defense secretary was somehow apprehensive with the possible provision of firearms for civilians.

In his speech during the birthday celebration of Masbate Gov. Antonio Kho last Thursday, Duterte said he would allow each civilian and mayor to purchase firearms to help in the campaign to end the NPA rebellion, citing ambushes by the communist rebels of soldiers and policemen.

But, the President added, he was willing to talk peace with them if the insurgents would tone down their attacks on government forces.

Lorenzana said in case the proposal would prosper, proper training must be observed among civilians on how to handle guns before they are released to them.

He also said there should be proper control so that civilians and local chief executives would not use the privilege to purchase firearms freely for illegal activities.

"Bottomline, it may not be advisable to arm everybody for all the problems that it may cause," Lorenzana pointed out.

He said the military already has its Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Unit (Cafgu) and Special Cafgu, who are civilians armed by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).



Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana

"The beauty of the Cafgu program is that [the members] are under the AFP and subject to military justice," Lorenzana added.

The Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), meanwhile, reminded all local government units not to give in to demands of the NPA rebels for "permit-to-campaign fees," with the election season having begun last week.

Jonathan Mañaya, DILG spokesman, pointed to Memorandum Circular No. 2018-211 issued by Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, reminding all locally elected officials not to provide any form of support to NPA members.

Mañaya also warned that local officials supporting the communist rebels financially would suffer the penalty of reclusion temporal if found guilty of violating Republic Act 10168 or the "Terrorism Financing Prevention and Suppression Act of 2012."

"The DILG may also file other charges pursuant to the Revised Penal Code and other pertinent laws and seek the disqualification of all those candidates who shall be proved to have cooperated with non-state actors in accordance with provisions of the Omnibus Election Code," he said in a statement.

DEMPSEY REYES

Maguindanao clan leaders on the run after drug raid

KIDAPAWAN CITY—The mayor and vice mayor of a Maguindanao town are now on the run after escaping during a police antidrug raid on their house more than two years after one of them landed on President Duterte's list of narco-politicians.

Mayor Vicman Montawal, of Datu Montawal town, and his father, Vice Mayor Ottoh Montawal, fled when 50 heavily armed police officers from the Philippine National Police-Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (PNP-ARMM) barged into their house in the village of Talapas to serve search warrants for gun possession and illegal drugs.

Police were armed with warrants issued by Judge Alexander Betoya, of the

Regional Trial Court Branch 16, against the mayor, vice mayor and Vicman's brother, Andy.

President's list

Vice Mayor Montawal was among the officials of Maguindanao publicly named by the President in August 2016 as politicians involved in drugs.

A member of the raiding team told reporters that government forces had been coordinating with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to help locate the Montawals.

Police earlier reported two of the mayor's armed security escorts were killed when they traded shots with lawmen.

Neighbors identified the slain escorts as Belag and Mantak, both surnamed Alon.

The same report said the three Montawals used a secret escape route at the back of the huge Montawal compound and fled toward Bulod, a swampy village accessible only by motorboat.

Krishel Montawal, wife of Vice Mayor Montawal, said the raiding team found no illegal drugs in their home.

Ransacked

She showed newsmen the family bedroom where police allegedly took some P3 million worth of jewelry and almost P400,000 in cash.

Reporters were barred from enter-

ing the Montawal compound while police clearing operations were ongoing.

Around noon, when police left, Krishel allowed reporters entry and showed them disarranged home appliances and other items including the safety box that contained pieces of jewelry and cash which was forcibly opened.

No one from the raiding team had issued a statement on the raid. The ARMM police force has yet to issue a statement.

Montawal repeatedly denied he was involved in drugs. Officials of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency in ARMM have also declared the town, named after Montawal's parents, as a drug-free municipality in 2017. —EDWIN O. FERNANDEZ INQ

MILF chief sets foot in Maguindanao military camp

By JOHN UNSON

MAGUINDANAO – The leader of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) yesterday set foot in a military camp here since the Muslim rebel group was founded in 1980.

Hadji Murad Ebrahim, chairman of the MILF's central committee, visited the Army's Camp Gonzalo Siongco in Maguindanao.

It was his first time to set foot in a military camp since leading the MILF in bloody encounters with the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

"This for me is very historic. This is my first time to enter this military camp," the 71-year-old Murad told his erstwhile enemies in Camp Siongco.

Murad graced the invitation of Maj. Gen. Cirillito Sobejana, commander of the 6th ID.

The 6th ID's engagement with Murad was meant to sustain the cordiality between the MILF and officers and men of the military unit in Central Mindanao.

The MILF has more than 30 government-recognized



Hadji Murad Ebrahim of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front signs the guest registry of the Army's 6th Infantry Division during his first ever visit to Camp Siongco in Maguindanao yesterday.

JOHN UNSON

enclaves in the region under its July 1997 interim ceasefire accord.

"Our enemies are oppres-

sion, injustice and exploitation, not the military as an organization. The armed conflicts we had were only

circumstantial because the military is part of the government's defense structure. We were never enemies," Murad told the troops.

Sobejana said he was elated with Murad's positive response to their invitation for him to meet the officials of 6th ID and its troops deployed in Central Mindanao.

A Moro officer in 6th ID, Col. Markton Abo, also the division's civil-military relations officer, with their spokesman, Maj. Arvin Encinas, helped Sobejana facilitate the reception honors for Murad.

Murad and Sobejana have agreed to cooperate in ensur-

ing the safety of the Jan. 21 plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL).

Murad started as a guerrilla in the Moro National Liberation Front in the early 1970s.

He and the Egyptian-trained cleric, Salamat Hashim, bolted from the group and organized the MILF shortly before 1980 due to irreconcilable differences with MNLF founder Nur Misuari.

The meeting of Murad and Army officials in Camp Siongco was also attended by representatives from the 1st Marine Brigade from Sultan Kudarat, where there is also a strong MILF presence. *h*



5 nabbed, bombs seized from terrorists' camp

MAGUINDANAO -- Authorities arrested five alleged members of the terrorist Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters following a raid on the BIFF's camp in Paglat, Maguindanao on Saturday.

The raid in Barangay Danakling also resulted in the recovery of three improvised explosive devices and three pistols, according to Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, chief of the Army's 6th Infantry Division.

Sobejana attributed the success of the operation to the cooperation shown by residents and local officials.

Members of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group based in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and the 4th Special Action Battalion of the police assisted the military during the raid.

The arrested suspects were followers of radical clerics Yasser Saligan and Sheikh Makakena, Sobejana said.

Saligan and Makakena were tagged in separate attacks in Isulan, Sultan Kudarat last year.

- John Unson

Troops foil new terror plot in Mindanao

By ALI G. MACABALANG

COTABATO CITY – Security forces have foiled another alleged plot to bomb urban centers in Central Mindanao after seizing improvised bombs in a village in Maguindanao on Saturday, according to an Army official.

Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, Army's 33rd Infantry Battalion chief, said his unit led the counter-terror raid at Sitio Pagalad, Barangay Damatling in Paglat town, following a tip about the presence of bombs and suspected terrorists in

the area.

He said the informant provided photos showing known terrorist bombers Ustadz Yasser Saligan and Sheikh Makakena handling a bomb. The suspects have been under surveillance since late 2018, he added.

Troops from the 33rd IB, the 4th Special Action Battalion, the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, and the provincial police raided the sitio, a known "terrorist lair," at around 3 a.m. on Saturday, he said.

Five men were arrested, and four improvised bombs and three .45 caliber

pistols were recovered, Cabunoc said.

He said Shiek Makakena and Ustadz Yasser eluded arrest by jumping into the murky water of the Liguasan Marsh as the troops approached.

Cabunoc believed the explosives with triggering devices were meant for urban terror use in nearby Sultan Kudarat where deadly bombings happened last year.

Saturday's raid followed the pre-dawn raid by a team of military intelligence agents at Barangay Tatak on the border of Rajah Buayan and two other Maguindanao towns against lo-

cal militants harboring foreign bomb-making experts.

Sources said the raiding team thought their targets were fewer, only to be surprised that more than 80 heavily armed men put up a five-hour fight that resulted in the killing of an Army sergeant and the wounding of a Marine captain.

Four of the terrorists were killed, including Abu Hud Zain, a Singaporean, and Abdulrahid Ruhmisanti, an Indonesian.

Reports reaching Manila Bulletin said the Marine captain, who was wounded in the chin and neck, and his

men ran out of rifle rounds, and were left with just handguns.

They said the outnumbered team recovered improvised bombs and other terror materials believed to be used in urban centers during the Christmas and New Year celebrations.

On Dec. 31, two improvised bombs were planted in a mall here, one of which was recovered and the other exploded near the mall's gate, killing two civilians and wounding more than 30 others. The deadly attack was believed to be "retaliation" for the Dec. 22 military raid.

Troops foil Maguindanao bombing plot

BY AL JACINTO AND JULMUNIR I. JANNARAL

SECURITY forces thwarted the bombing attempt on urban centers in Sultan Kudarat province after five suspected pro-Islamic State bandits were captured, but two of their leaders escaped during a dramatic raid on the terrorists' hideout in Maguindanao on Saturday.

Officials said soldiers and Special Action Force (SAF) commandos snaked their way through thick bushes under cover of darkness undetected by the group and seized five bandits in Barangay

Pagalad in Paglat town.

Two of its notorious and elusive leaders, Ustadz Yasser Saligan and Sheik Makakena alias Abu Jihad, escaped the daring raid by the 33rd Infantry Battalion (33IB)

and the 4th SAF of the regional police force.

Major Arvin Encinas, spokesman for the 6th Infantry Division (6ID), said the 33IB Makabayan, under Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, orchestrated the counter-terrorist operations in the remote village.

"Our informant showed us the pictures of terrorist bombers Saligan and his cohort Makakena, as they detonated a bomb to test how lethal it is. We had been tracking the suspects since November 2018," Cabunoc said.

He added that Abu Jihad and

Ustadz Yasser escaped by jumping into the murky waters of the Liguasan Marsh.

The troops were still tracking down the two leaders, while those captured are being interrogated separately at undisclosed locations in the restive region.

The troops seized four anti-personnel mines and three caliber .45 pistols from the suspects.

Military pressure

Meanwhile, Cabunoc said five bandits belonging to the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)

headed by Mayogantong Bansil also surrendered and handed over their weapons over the weekend in Barangay Makainis of General Salipada Pendatun town.

Mayogantong sent surrender feelers after knowing that security forces were in the adjacent town of Paglat, about 5 kilometers away from his area.

He contacted Cabunoc to confirm his intention to lay down their arms.

"I am afraid that the AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) will launch offensives against our group," Mayogantong said.

He and his men surrendered

four high-powered firearms including a caliber .50 sniper rifle, two M1 Garand rifles, and a 40mm M79 grenade launcher.

The 33IB has facilitated the surrender of various threat groups both in Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat through combat operations, community engagements and civil affair activities.

Since February 2017, the unit successfully facilitated the surrender of 203 communist rebels and 32 BIFF men, setting a benchmark in the conduct of military operations in a "two-front war" against distinct threat groups.

Troops foil bombing plot in Central Mindanao

COTABATO CITY — Security forces have foiled another alleged plot to bomb urban centers in Central Mindanao after they seized improvised bombs in a village in Maguindanao Saturday, an Army official said.

Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, Army 33rd Infantry Battalion chief, said his unit led the counter-terror raid in Sitio Pagalad, Barangay Damakling in Paglat, following a tip about the presence of bombs and suspected terrorists in the area.

Cabunoc said their informant

provided him photos showing terrorist bombers Ustadz Yasser Salgan and Sheikh Makakena, alias "Abu Jihad," handling a bomb. The suspects were under surveillance since late 2018, he added.

Combined troops of the 33rd IB, the 4th Special Action Battalion, the Philippine National Police Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, and the provincial police raided the sitio, a known "terrorist lair," at around 3 a.m., he said.

The raiding troops arrested five surprised enemies and recovered

four improvised bombs and three .45 caliber (1911 model) pistols, Cabunoc said.

He said main targets Abu Jihad and Ustadz Yasser eluded arrest by jumping into the murky waters of the Liguasan Marsh upon sensing the arrival of the raiding troops.

Cabunoc believed the explosives with triggering devices were meant for urban terror use in nearby Sultan Kudarat where deadly bombings happened last year.

The raid was the latest of local success in foiling terror plots.

It followed the pre-dawn raid by a team of 12 military intelligence operatives in Barangay Tatak on the marshy border of Rajahmundry and two other Maguindanao towns against local militants harboring foreign bomb-making experts.

Sources said the raiding team thought their targets were fewer, only to be surprised that more than 80 heavily armed men put up a five-hour fight that resulted to the killing of an Army sergeant and the wounding of a Marine captain leading the team.

Four of the enemies were killed, including two foreigners identified as Abu Hud Zain, a Singaporean, and Abdulrahid Ruhmisanti, an Indonesian.

The Marine captain, who was wounded in the chin and neck, and his men ran out of ammunition, and were left with just handguns to fight the enemies for five hours starting before dawn.

Higher officers have recommended the team for citations, with the wounded captain with the Medal of Valor. (All Macabalang) 4

Regions in briefs

5 MAUTE REMNANTS SURRENDER IN LANAOSUR

MARAWI CITY, Lanao del Sur: Five remnants of the Maute/Islamic State (IS)-inspired group who belonged to the Abu Dar unit surrendered to the government in separate occasions, the military said. Three of the group surrendered to the 82nd Infantry Battalion in Plagapo, Lanao del Sur on Saturday and turned over one rocket propelled grenade (RPG), a grenade launcher, one M1-Garand rifle and several ammunitions, military said. Two of their comrades earlier surrendered to the 55th Infantry Battalion Pagayawan town in Lanao del Sur and yielded a caliber KG 9 sub-machine gun and one caliber .45 pistol. The military withheld the names of the surrenderers for security purpose. Owayda Benito Marohombas, also known as Abu Dar, became the leader of the Maute/IS remnants after the successful military operation during the Marawi siege. "While we are supporting the recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation of Marawi, our efforts against Maute/IS remnants will be continuous in order to achieve a peaceful and progressive community in our area of operation," Col. Romeo Brawner, 103rd Infantry Brigade Commander, said.

A7 MASIDING NOOR YAHYA

3 pa sa Maute-ISIS, sumurender

Tatlo pang Maute-ISIS remnants, na kaanib ng grupo ni Abu Dar, ang sumuko sa militar sa Lanao del Sur, nitong Sabado ng gabi.

Hindi na ibimunyag ni 82nd Infantry Battalion (IB) commander, Lt. Col. Jason Jumawari ang pagkakakilanlan ng tatlong terorista para na rin sa kanilang seguridad.

Ang mga ito, ayon kay Jumawari, ay sumuko sa kanilang military unit sa Pingapo sa lalawigan.

"Dissatisfied and discontented with the leadership and capabilities of the group is the reason why they've surrendered," ayon sa opisyal.

Sinabi ni Jumawari na isinuko rin ng tatlo ang kanilang mga armas, na kinabibilangan ng isang rocket propelled grenade (RPG) launcher, isang grenade launcher, isang M14 Garand rifle, at mga bala nito.

Biyernes nang naunang sumuko ang

dalawa pang Maute-ISIS remnants sa 55th IB sa Pagayawan, Lanao del Sur.

Matatandaang tumagal nang limang buwan ang pakikipagbakbakan ng militar sa Maute-ISIS sa Marawi City nang salakayin ang kubkubin ng teroristang grupo ang siyudad noong Mayo 23, 2017.

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Bonita L. Ermac

Galvez, UN to beef up ties for Bangsamoro transition

By JOSE RODEL CLAPANO

Presidential adviser on the peace process Carlito Galvez Jr. has urged the United Nations to continue its assistance in providing capacity development to key leaders in the Bangsamoro.

"Our focus now is how to have good governance on the new Bangsamoro government. I would like to request the UN family to help us in mentoring key leaders on how to be efficient and effective in governance," Galvez told officials of various UN agencies who paid

him a courtesy call last Friday. Galvez also thanked the UN for its continued support for the peace process.

"I think your projects that are people-centered and those on human resource development are good. I would like to thank you for helping us and sharing the same goal," he said.

Galvez cited the role of UN agencies in helping counter violent extremism, preventing the recruitment of child soldiers, empowering women and developing the whole Mindanao region.

"I believe that if we have

peace in Mindanao, we have peace in the Philippines. If we have development in Mindanao, we have development in the Philippines," he said.

The United Nations' partnership framework is anchored on the Sustainable Development Goals 2019-2023. It aims to achieve outcomes related to people-centeredness, economic prosperity and peace.

In his remarks during the courtesy call, UN resident coordinator Ola Almgren expressed interest in Office of the the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP)'s

practices in the peace process.

"OPAPP has contributed a lot to the global practice. The UN is looking forward to your experiences and best practices, hoping that you can participate in global fora and share them as well as to work with you and your staff," Almgren said.

Among the UN agencies present in the meeting were the United Nations Development Program, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, UN Women, International Organization for Migration, and Prevention on Violent Extremism. *PC*

Priest sees peaceful Bangsamoro plebiscite

THE Catholic priest who was taken hostage by Islamic State-inspired Maute terrorists in 2017 said he was optimistic that the plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) would be peaceful.

Rev. Father Teresito "Chito" Suganob said educating voters would strengthen and protect the result of the plebiscite from groups that do not seek peace in Mindanao.

He said voters should be properly be informed on the consequences of a "Yes" or "No" vote during the plebiscite, which would determine the composition of the new Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

"I am praying for the success of the Bangsamoro Organic Law because everybody is affected whatever the outcome. If this turns out successful, this could mean an end to armed conflict in Mindanao," he said.

Suganob is the chairman of Pakigdaan Inc., one of the civil society organizations in Lanao del Norte that help educate voters on the BOL provisions. A8

The Commission on Elections is set to hold the plebiscite in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao on January 21. The plebiscite in other areas will be on February 6.

PNA

IS anti-BOL bid thwarted

Vigilant state forces foiled what was believed to be efforts of extremist groups to spoil the scheduled plebiscite for the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) set for 21 January and 6 February.

Acting on an informant's report about plots by an Islamic State (IS)-linked group to carry out bombings in Sultan Kudarat and North Cotabato, the Army and police forces raided at dawn

Turn to page 6

They belonged to the BIFF faction led by Commander Mayogantong Bansil

From page 1

yesterday a safe house that also resulted in the surrender of five terrorists.

State forces also seized powerful improvised explosive devices and four handguns.

"What is important is we prevented bloody bombings these terrorists are planning to carry out," said Lt. Col. Harold Cabunoc, commander of the 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB).

The "lightning attack" counter-terrorist operation was launched at 3 a.m. in Barangay Palagad in Maguindanao.

Bombers active

He said the operation was quickly launched after an "asset" showed photos of bomb makers Ustadz Yasser Saligan and his cohort, Sheik Makakena alias Abul Jihad, trying to test the destructiveness of a homemade bomb.

Under cover of darkness, government forces swooped down on the pinpointed terrorist lair.

Five gunmen were caught sleeping

and were surprised to see soldiers and policemen surrounding them right inside their homes.

"We successfully got inside the house without anyone of them knowing," Cabunoc said.

"However, the subject bombers managed to elude arrest by jumping into the murky waters from a separate shanty nearby," he added.

Seized from the suspects were four improvised bombs and three .45-caliber pistols.

Four hours later, relatives of a Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) leader informed Cabunoc about rebels wanting to surrender.

"They belonged to the BIFF faction led by Commander Mayogantong Bansil," he said.

Bansil and his men surrendered four high-powered firearms, including a .50-caliber sniper rifle, two M1 Garand rifles and a 40mm M79 grenade launcher.

Peace offensive

The surrendered weapons were presented to Brig. Gen. Robert Danz, commander of the 1st Mechanized Infantry Brigade, the unit that has operational control over the 33rd IB.

"You have shown the expertise in handling the security threats without incurring casualties. Share these best practices in the conduct of operations to all Army units in Central Mindanao," said Danz, who earned his first star rank last week.

Maj. Gen. Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the "BIFF's world is getting smaller every day."

Five gunmen were caught sleeping and were surprised to see soldiers and police surrounding them right inside their homes.

"The public is now helping us. This is very encouraging and discouraging on the part of the terrorists," Sobejana said.

Talks as tack

The military is also pushing dialogues in Maguindanao to ensure a peaceful and orderly BOL plebiscite.

The military-led "security meeting" was attended by area commanders of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and Moro National Liberation Front from various municipalities, Lt. Col. Edgar Catu, commanding officer of the Army's 40th IB, said.

Held at the 40 IB's headquarters in Rajahmundry town, Catu said the meeting was "part of my unit's efforts in preparation for the successful conduct of upcoming plebiscite and to establish good rapport and promote peace among the participants."

Brig. Gen. Diosdado Carreon, commander of the Army's 801st Infantry Brigade, lauded the dialogue as it sought to "strengthen our good relationship and communication with other peace-inclined groups to pursue genuine reform and development in Central Mindanao."

The Manila Times

Oplan Sauron

POLICE Regional Office 7 (PRO-7) Director Debold Sinas has announced the relief of and filing of administrative charges against five Cebu-based police officers who were found to have been remiss in their duties during the Dec. 27 to 29, 2018 Oplan Sauron in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental. To recall, PRO-7 deployed more than a thousand policemen, supported by army troops, to conduct a massive police operation in Guihulngan City. Five alleged New People's Army (NPA) assassins were killed while other alleged NPA members were arrested for illegal possession of firearms. More than 80 search warrants for subjects in Guihulngan City had been issued by Judge Soliver Peras, Regional Trial Court Branch 10 in Cebu City, on Dec. 20 to 21, 2018.

Chief Inspector Jomar Medill was relieved as head of the Cebu City Police Tourist Police Unit, and two police inspectors from the Regional Mobile Force were also removed. They are now facing administrative charges for abandoning their posts, absence without leave, and conduct unbecoming police officers for leaving Guihulngan City and returning to Cebu while the operations were still going on.

PO1s Melvin and Thomas Canete of the Regional Police Safety Battalion were relieved for "cowardice and running away from their posts during the shootout" (*Cebu Daily News*, January 9).

The swift disciplinary action taken against the five policemen is meant to send the message that theirs is not the example to follow.

However, seen from a different perspective, one might actually sympathize with the relieved police officers. There were no real shootouts or exchange of fire. The five men killed reportedly did not shoot it out with the police. Maybe this is what the Canetes were running away from.

According to some accounts of the operation, the young son of one of the fatalities reportedly pleaded with the policemen who served the search warrant not to shoot his father. In another case, the operatives told everyone, except for the subject of the warrant, to get out of the house. Suddenly, shots were heard from inside the house. One fatality was allegedly put inside a sack and shot dead.

Another source told me that the officers who served the search warrant covered their faces, did not read the search warrant, turned off the lights (the searches were done at 4 in the morning), and a witness was called only after the search was completed.

Understandably, Chief Supt. Sinas is eager



RESURGENCE

MARIT STINUS- CABUGON

NPA's liquidation of soldiers and barangay officials, and harassment of police camps in Guihulngan City. While there are army troops in Guihulngan City, they are few and scattered, giving the NPA ample opportunity to terrorize the

population. It is commendable that the PRO-7 director decided to launch a large-scale operation to neutralize these murderous elements.

However, the manner in which at least some of the search warrants were implemented may actually strengthen the NPA in the longer term, and galvanize support for it. After all, it was exactly the abuses committed decades ago that produced the hatred in the hearts of some Guihulnganons against men in uniform. Malacañang's Executive Order 70 with its focus on addressing the root causes of insurgency, seeks to prevent a repeat of past mistakes. In fighting the bad guys, we have to show that we are not like them.

One consequence of Oplan Sauron is that students of some schools have been afraid to go out after hearing about what happened — the fatalities were the fathers of their schoolmates.

Before Oplan Sauron, some residents were already leaving Barangay Trinidad — a large village located at the center of Negros Island — because of the threats of the NPA, but now people — adults and children — have reportedly become scared of "the men in uniform" as well. The class absences resulting from a deteriorating peace and order situation should concern Education Secretary Leonor Briones, most especially since she is a Guihulnganon.

Karapatan attempted to conduct one of its so-called fact-finding missions but was told to secure a permit from Negros Oriental Gov. Roel Degamo first. While we all want to know the truth about the killings and arrests — especially in the light of the alleged police abuses — Karapatan, by its very purpose of existence, gets only the "facts" that put authorities in a bad light while rights violations committed by the NPA are either ignored or justified.

Twenty-four hours into the implementation of Oplan Sauron, Guihulngan City broadcaster Gabriel Alburo was killed by riding-in-tandem gunmen in the neighboring town of La Libertad.

On January 6, the NPA murdered Cagu member Joseph Silvano Gavia in far-flung Linantuyan.

And three days ago, a *habalhabal* driver from the poor, underdeveloped village of Laos became another riding-in-tandem victim, only a few meters away from a police detachment. It's business as usual as Guihulngan City welcomes its third

ONLINE NEWS

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Army foils BIFF bomb plot, seizes IEDs, nabs 5 rebels

By: **Edwin O. Fernandez** - @inquirerdotnet

[Inquirer Mindanao](#) / 09:32 AM January 13, 2019

TACURONG CITY, Philippines – Military and police foiled early Saturday another attempt by Islamic State (IS)-linked terrorists to bomb targets in Mindanao after they raided a rebels' safehouse, recovered powerful homemade bombs and arrested five terrorists.

Lt. Colonel Harold Cabunoc, commander of the 33rd Infantry Battalion (IB), told the INQUIRER that Army and police units launched a "lightning attack" on a lair of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) at about 3 a.m. on Saturday in Paglat town in Maguindanao.

"We launched the counter-terrorist operation after learning of the presence of bombs in the village of Palagad, Paglat town," Cabunoc said.

"Our informant showed us the pictures of terrorist bombers Ustadz Yasser Saligan and his cohort, Sheik Makakena, a.k.a. Abu Jihad, as they detonated a bomb to test its lethality," said Cabunoc.

He said, "We had been tracking the suspects since November 2018."

Under the cover of darkness, elements of the 33rd IB, backed by 4th Special Action Force (SAF) Battalion, Criminal Investigation and Detection Group-ARMM and Maguindanao Provincial Police Office, swooped down on the terrorist lair.

Cabunoc said five people were caught off-guard by the heavily armed soldiers and SAF commandos.

"We seized four improvised bombs and three caliber .45 M1911A1 pistols from the suspects," he said.

However, two primary suspects, Abu Jihad and Ustadz Yasser, managed to elude arrest by jumping into the Liguasan Marsh.

He said the BIFF were planning to bomb civilian and military targets in urban communities in Sultan Kudarat and North Cotabato.

At 10 a.m. Saturday, the raiding team proceeded to Barangay Makainis in Gen. SK Pendatun town to receive five BIFF members, including a commander, who surrendered.

They belonged to the BIFF faction of Commander Mayogantong Bansil, a notorious rebel involved in attacks on civilians and the military.

Cabunoc said Bansil sent surrender feelers after knowing the presence of security forces in the adjacent town of Paglat some 5 kilometers away.

"His relative contacted me by phone to confirm his willingness to lay down his arms. He was afraid that we will launch offensives against his group on the same day," added Cabunoc.

Bansil and his men surrendered four high-powered firearms, including a cal. 50 sniper rifle, two M1 Garand rifles, and a 40 mm M79 grenade launcher.

The weapons will be presented to Brig. Gen. Robert Daus, commander of the 1st Mechanized Infantry Brigade, which has operational control over the 33rd IB.

Daus has commended the operating troops for their latest feat against terrorism.

"You have shown the expertise in handling the security threats without incurring casualties. Share these best practices in the conduct of operations to all Army units in Central Mindanao," said Daus, who earned his first-star rank last week.

Major General Cirilito Sobejana, commander of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said the BIFF's "world is getting smaller every day."

"We have won the support of the people in Central Mindanao. The people themselves have voluntarily provided information about the hiding places of the terrorists," Sobejana said. /cbb

www.inquirer.net

9 soldiers hurt in blast during encounter in Samar

By: Robert Dejon - Correspondent / @rdejonINQ

Philippine Daily Inquirer / 04:55 PM January 12, 2019

ORMOC CITY—Nine soldiers were wounded when an improvised explosive device went off near an encounter site in Barangay Bay-ang, San Jorge, Samar about 6:50 a.m. Saturday.

Capt. Francis Agno, Division Public Affairs Officer, of the 8th Infantry Division in Camp Lukban, Catbalogan, Samar said a report from Lt. Col. Rizaldo N. Laurena, Commanding Officer of the 63rd Infantry Battalion based in Barangay Eranas, San Jorge, said his troops were on their way to Bay-ang when they chanced upon a group of suspected New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas.

The encounter triggered a brief firefight.

At the height of the firefight, an explosion occurred resulting in the slight wounding of the nine soldiers, he said. The wounds came from the IED shrapnel.

An undetermined number of casualties on the NPA side was noted as blood stains were found in their escape route.

www.pna.gov.ph

DND to coordinate with DFA on passport data mess

By Priam Nepomuceno January 13, 2019, 3:09 pm

MANILA -- The Department of National Defense (DND) will coordinate with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to examine details on the alleged passport data mess involving a former contractor of the latter and how to mitigate its effects.

"If true, then it is a very grave security concern and quite alarming. These are personal information such as full name, date and place of birth and other information that could be used illegally," DND Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said in a message to reporters Sunday.

"We will get in touch with the DFA to find out the details of this issue and how to mitigate its ill effect," he added.

DFA Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr., in a Twitter exchange Wednesday, revealed that the previous contractor has made inaccessible the data it was entrusted to after its printing contract was terminated.

Before the contract for the production of Philippine electronic passports was awarded to the APO Production Unit Inc. (APUI), the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), through a French firm, had been printing passport booklets. **(PNA)**

www.pna.gov.ph

DND backs PRRD rejection of 'purely military solution' vs. Reds

By Priam Nepomuceno January 12, 2019, 11:18 am

MANILA -- Department of National Defense (DND) Secretary Delfin Lorenzana expressed support for President Rodrigo Duterte's decision not to use a purely military solution in ending the communist threat in the country.

"The DND fully supports the President's decision not to employ a purely military solution to ending the communist insurgency in the country," Lorenzana said in a statement forwarded to reporters at 9:54 p.m. Friday.

This, he said, is emphasized by the national government's initiative to work closely with the local government units in pursuing localized peace talks, community support and development, and promotion of good governance, all aimed at neutralizing the insurgency threat.

This also includes the implementation of the Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Programs or E-CLIP, which helps former rebels start their lives anew by providing financial, livelihood, and educational assistance, psychosocial support, and housing, the defense chief added.

"While focused military actions will weaken their armed component, it is the promise of a better life for their families that drives their members to return to civil society and the fold of the law," Lorenzana added.

The DND chief also said that the government has the momentum, support and resources to render the Communist Party of the Philippines - New People's Army - National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF) strategically and politically irrelevant by 2022.

"By the end of President Rodrigo Duterte's term, the NPA will be reduced into a purely police problem of running after robbers, criminals, arsonists, and extortionists," he said.

Without the NPA as an armed component, which is listed as a terror organization by the United States and European Union, Lorenzana said the CPP will become just like any another political party, whose only chance of taking over the government is by winning an election.

"(This is) something that the Filipino people will never let happen because their (NPA) hands are stained with the blood of thousands of Filipinos they have sacrificed in the altar of a discredited and failed ideology. (CPP chief) Joma Sison and his cohorts abroad will just become footnotes in history, and will soon be forgotten," he said. (PNA)